

A New Life

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A New Life

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Summary

Natasha wasn't sure what she'd expected from Barton's wife, but it really wasn't this. If anything, she'd thought Laura would see her as a threat. What sort of man brought a woman he'd only just met, a dangerous woman at that, to stay with him his civilian wife?

Notes

My MCU Ladies Exchange fic for hiddencait! I hope you like it :)

It was really interesting (and incredibly difficult ngl) to write about Natasha and Laura at the start of their relationship. I hope it came through alright since really, they're very different ppl here than in the movies. In the original outline there was a section where Natasha taught Laura self defense, as per the request, but Natasha decided to get introspective instead. Whoops.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Natasha stared out the window of the car, trying to ignore the itch of unease that hadn't left her over the past two weeks. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Barton, nodding his head as he sang quietly to the radio.

She thought he was trying to be quiet because of her, but she wasn't really sure why. The twangy music didn't bother her so much as not knowing why someone was doing something. It hadn't taken her long to figure out that he was strange though, even for a SHIELD agent. She'd learned that the day he refused to take her out and instead had taken her in. And again when he fought to have her given probationary status.

The car bucked a little as they moved from the smooth asphalt to a bumpier gravel driveway. In the distance, Natasha could see a white house and what looked like a woman standing on the porch. That was probably Barton's wife, he'd talked about her several times. The smile on Barton's face grew as they approached until he was almost vibrating with barely contained excitement. As soon as he put the car in park, he was out, arms stretched wide as he grabbed his wife and spun her around, both of them laughing.

Natasha stayed in the car for the reunion, watching with detached interest at how obviously the two of them adored one another. It was strange for her to see such a display from someone like Barton, strange as he was, and especially when not entirely in private. Someone like him, someone like them, shouldn't be capable of emotion like that.

"Natasha, get out of the car already!" Barton called, waving at her. He had one arm wrapped securely around his wife's waist and she was smiling at Natasha like she was happy to meet this strange woman her husband had brought.

It would be churlish to refuse to leave the car, though, so Natasha unbuckled and got out, approaching the couple slowly. She hoped she came off as non-threatening because much as this was a strange situation, there were really few other options for her. Outside of SHIELD lay only a price on her head and inside SHIELD were many people who would be only to happy to give her up. She couldn't even blame them for that, it was the smart choice.

"Nat, this is my wife, Laura," Barton said, smiling widely as he looked between them. Natasha tensed imperceptibly as she waited for the blowback that would inevitably come. "Laura, this is Natasha. She needs to stay with us for awhile. Uh, sorry I couldn't call ahead, but you know how it is."

"It's fine, Clint," Laura replied, smiling as she stepped forward to hug Natasha. "I'm so happy to meet you! Please, come in and make yourself at home."

The hug was so unexpected that Natasha couldn't pull herself together to do anything before Laura was moving back and heading for the house. Barton followed close behind, waving an encouraging hand at Natasha to follow as well. They were saying something about freshly baked banana bread, but somehow, against all her training, Natasha found it impossible to concentrate on their words.

Natasha wasn't sure what she'd expected from Barton's wife, but it really wasn't this. If anything, she'd thought Laura would see her as a threat. What sort of man brought a woman he'd only just met, a dangerous woman at that, to stay with him his civilian wife? Natasha might not know much about relationships, that hadn't been exactly an important subject in her training, but she was fairly certain most women wouldn't take kindly to a strange woman being invited to stay in their home with no notice. Even more than that, Laura had invited her in with literally open arms.

It was all just so strange. Shaking her head at the ridiculousness of the situation and her own thoughts, Natasha followed the couple inside.

The next few days passed not much more comfortably than the introduction, at least from Natasha's point of view. Barton, for all that he'd saved her from death, was still a relative stranger and she wasn't sure how to interact with him. He wasn't a mark, wasn't a teammate, so what did that leave? She'd never had a friend before and honestly wasn't sure what to do with that sentiment even if that's what he potentially was.

Even more confusing was Laura. She'd embraced Natasha from the moment she met her and had continued to treat her in ways that Natasha just didn't understand. How was she supposed to react to kindness and acceptance like this? It made her irritable and unsure, though she made sure not to show it. She was still a guest here, an outsider, and she needed to hold on to the welcome they'd given her. There wasn't anywhere else for her to go if she messed this up.

Natasha and Laura were sitting in the living room one morning, Laura flipping through channels on the tv while Natasha perched uncomfortably on a chair on the opposite side of the room. She was finding it hard to relax. A lifetime of constantly being aware of threats and danger had not prepared her for the life on the Barton farm in the middle of nowhere. It was hard to convince herself that she was safe, that there was nothing she needed to be doing or watching for here.

Laura had apparently just settled on a show when Barton came in from whatever he'd been doing outside. He stood in the doorway, wiping his muddied boots on the mat, but what Natasha immediately noticed was the look on his face. It was drawn, worried even, and that worried her. Was there a threat even though no one should know where she was or even, as Barton had assured her, that this place existed?

"What's wrong?"

Laura immediately turned to the doorway when Natasha spoke, her spine straightening with tension brought on by sudden worry and fear. "Honey," she said slowly, obviously noticing the look on his face as well, "what is it?"

"Sorry," Barton said, coming fully into the house and sitting heavily on the closest chair. "I didn't mean to worry you, either of you. It's nothing bad, well, not really, they just promised they wouldn't do this right now. I just... I've got a three-week mission. I leave tonight."

There was a moment of silence before Laura began laughing, head thrown back as she let loose with a sound that was half hilarity and half delirious. Both Natasha and Barton stared at her, though Natasha could see the corner of Barton's mouth twitching like he wanted to smile. Natasha tried to figure out what was funny to either of them about the situation but couldn't come up with any explanation.

"That's all?" Laura asked a few minutes later, finally calmed down. "I thought there was some sort of emergency!"

"That's *all*?" Barton repeated, eyes bugging. "I'm going on a dangerous mission! How is that... how is that not a concern? Especially now?"

Natasha had a creeping feeling that the two of them weren't exactly talking about the same thing. Even more, she strongly suspected that Barton's words were a subtle reference to her staying in their house. The way his eyes darted to her before going back to his wife only cemented that conclusion. Did he think that she would be a danger to Laura if he wasn't there? She knew he didn't trust her, had no reason to trust her, but the thought stung somehow.

"Clint, it will be *fine*," Laura said, voice full of fond exasperation. "You brought her here already, you can leave her here with me for a few weeks. I'm sure we can find something to entertain her while you're gone."

"That's not-" Barton started to say, but cut himself off with a huff. "You're right," he continued after a long moment of silence, shaking his head. "Of course. I just want you, both of you, to be ok, you know?"

Laura nodded, looking expectantly at Natasha until she joined in. "Of course."

Unfortunately finding something to entertain Natasha on the farm while Barton was gone proved to be harder than Laura had obviously expected it to be.

It wasn't that the farm was boring per se, it just was very different from the kind of thing Natasha was used to. Her training should have prepared her for that, allowed her to easily adapt, but with each passing day, her training seemed to be doing her less and less good. She couldn't quite decide if that was a good thing or not considering her handlers wanted her dead for defection, but it certainly left her uncomfortable and at loose ends.

Laura had her own things to do, both around the house and with a baking business she ran on the side, mostly selling to the inhabitants of the nearby small town. She tried to give Natasha options to keep her busy, like watching tv and tending the animals, but after a few days those things lost their charm.

Part of the problem was that their buffer, Barton, was gone and Natasha didn't know how to act around Laura. Natasha had been raised around other girls and women, but Laura wasn't a killer or a seductress or any of the other thousands of things Natasha had been trained to be. Laura was just... normal. And that, that was something Natasha wasn't used to.

Mostly Natasha spent her time, when she wasn't exercising or training in the yard, in the spot that she'd claimed for her own, a seat in the corner of the living room with perfect sightlines to the window next to it and to the front door across the room. It also gave her the best view of the kitchen, obscured as it mostly was by a wall, where Laura spent most of her time during the day. It was somehow soothing to watch her flit by the doorway and hear the sounds of pots and pans and smell the cakes and cookies baking.

Nearly a week after Barton left on his mission, Natasha was doing just that. The tv was on, the sound a low buzz in the background, but she was more interested in the noises coming from the kitchen. Laura seemed to be singing along to the radio and, from what Natasha could see, dancing along as well. It made Natasha wish, just for a moment, that she could be as carefree and comfortable, but that seemed an absolutely fanciful thought. People like Natasha just weren't made for that life.

"Natasha!" Laura called from the doorway, making Natasha startle a little from her thoughts. It seemed like she'd gotten more caught up in them than she'd thought; that was something she'd need to work on. "Care to join me in the kitchen?"

"What do you mean?" Natasha asked, frowning.

"I mean, would you like to help me bake something?" Laura asked with one her kind smiles. "I don't have any orders today, so I was just going to make some cupcakes for us. I thought you might be bored and want to help."

Natasha considered this for a moment before deciding that there was no way there was any ulterior purpose for the question. But still, this was very far from her own realm of experience. "I don't think I can," she said slowly, hating to have to show weakness even in front of a civilian, even in front of Laura. "I don't know how to bake."

"Oh, don't worry about that, Clint didn't know how to bake when we first met either," Laura replied, smiling again. "Now he makes great cookies. I'll show you how to do everything, it's fine."

"Alright," Natasha said, a little reluctantly still, and followed her into the kitchen where pans and containers of ingredients were already waiting.

In all reality, Natasha felt very out of her element, but she wasn't sure what to do about it. The Bartons were offering her a place to stay, so she supposed she should help out if Laura asked, but she honestly wasn't sure she would be much help. Cooking and baking hadn't been particularly important skills according to her teachers, so she'd never learned anything more than was necessary for survival.

Despite those misgivings, Natasha found she caught on very quickly. Laura was a patient teacher and Natasha found it strangely easy to follow the other woman's instructions to measure this or mix that. In no time at all, the atmosphere of the room had relaxed significantly and Natasha even found herself laughing quietly at some of Laura's jokes. By that time, eating the cupcakes when they were finished was just a highly tasty bonus.

It was camaraderie like Natasha had never experienced it before, and it was doubly strange to be with someone like Laura, a civilian who she hardly knew. The thought stuck with her over the next few days as she began to spend more time helping Laura, in the kitchen and just sitting in the living room watching tv.

At first, she felt guilty about how comfortable she'd gotten here and she spent several tense hours avoiding Laura's company as much as possible. For a while she sat in the hayloft of the barn, teeth gritted as she tried to figure out how things had changed so drastically even just since Barton brought her to the farm. It wasn't something she could really explain or even understand, but somehow she thought it was a feeling like belonging, and she wasn't sure she'd ever had anything quite like it even in the murkiest reaches of her memories.

In her former life, before Barton refused his orders and brought her into SHIELD, Natasha had never had to think of these things. There was only her mission and her target and the things she'd been taught since she was a child. There was no room for comfort or friendship or introspection, and in fact those things would have likely brought her a world of punishment.

Now though... now was different.

She was at the precipice of a new life. She'd been accepted into SHIELD in a way, but it would take a long time before they trusted her, and probably a long time before she'd actually even be able to go on missions at all. She understood that and had accepted it when she accepted their offer of probationary status, but even that hadn't truly prepared her for the vast difference in her life as a Russian assassin and this new one she would build.

Friendship was one of those things she'd never considered as a possibility for herself. It barely registered as something that happened with other, normal, people. But against all odds, even against her own judgement and experience, she thought that she and Laura might just be becoming friends.

Laura, Natasha thought, seemed to think so as well with the way she smiled and laughed and seemed so genuinely excited anytime Natasha agreed to do something with her, whether it be baking or collecting eggs or going into town to deliver a birthday cake or just simply watching bad reality tv. The days, which had seemed so amorphous and uncomfortable when Natasha had first come to the farm, became fuller and Natasha could literally feel the way she relaxed into them.

The two of them were watching tv, now with both of them on the couch instead of Natasha in the seat by the window, when Barton returned from his mission a week and a half after their first foray into baking together. He stepped through the front door, a cheerful greeting freezing on his lips as he saw how close the two of them were sitting. Laura rose to meet him, not noticing the way his eyes darted between them, but Natasha felt something twist in the pit of her stomach.

While she'd been becoming friends with Laura, she'd never considered what Barton would feel about it. It was one thing to leave them at the house alone together, trusting at least enough that Natasha wouldn't become violent, but it was probably quite another to see them comfortable together, friendly even. For all she knew, he could take that as an invasion of his

private life and this whole new life she'd been considering could go up in flames in the blink of an eye.

"Looks like you two have gotten friendly without me!"

"Of course!" Laura said, laughing.

Natasha couldn't help a small smile at the sound. It was basically ingrained in her after the past few weeks. The laugh petered off as she realized what had been said and the tone Barton had used. He didn't sound mad at all. If anything, he sounded... pleased. That was more of a relief than Natasha wanted to admit. Despite the fact that she hadn't known Laura long and wasn't exactly sure how being a friend really worked, she hadn't wanted to lose the relationship they'd built.

"I told you it would be," Laura continued as she hugged her husband. "I even got Natasha to help me bake, she's much better than you were at the beginning!"

Barton turned to look at Natasha, still sitting a little tensely on the couch, and smiled before turning back to his wife. "That's wonderful," he said, giving her a kiss on the cheek. "Though somehow I just knew you two would become friends, at least to gang up on me."

"Oh, you've got that right," Laura replied, winking at Natasha conspiratorially. "You'll never be safe now!"

End Notes

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